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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SAN SALVADOR 003215

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TAGS: [ES](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KCOR](#) [ELECTIONS](#)

SUBJECT: EL SALVADOR: FDR LOSES BATTLE FOR OFFICIAL STATUS

REF: A. SAN SALVADOR 1079

[1](#)B. SAN SALVADOR 1673

[1](#)C. SAN SALVADOR 1747

[1](#)D. SAN SALVADOR 1803

Classified By: DCM Michael A. Butler, Reason 1.4 (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: On October 27, El Salvador's Supreme Electoral Council (TSE) threw out some 12,000 invalid signatures out of approximately 49,000 total signatures obtained by the moderate FMLN splinter group Revolutionary Democratic Front (FDR) in its efforts to obtain legal recognition as a party. FDR activists submitted additional signatures November 3, but the TSE was unable to validate sufficient signatures to qualify the party for official status prior to a November 11 deadline, and the Legislative Assembly declined to intervene in the matter. Any FDR participation in March 12 municipal and Legislative Assembly elections must now be pursued via alliances with established parties and coalition candidates. Their absence from the official slate may preserve FMLN incumbents' seats in races where the FDR would otherwise have split the leftist vote. END SUMMARY.

BACKGROUND

[1](#)2. (C) The birth of the FDR had its roots in a continuing process of disintegration within the FMLN during 2005. In its April 3 national convention, the FMLN passed a number of "reforms" that included the virtual abolishment of open primaries, and their replacement by a hardliner-controlled process of "consensus" that lacked transparency (see ref. A). (Note: These "reforms" further consolidated control of the FMLN by orthodox hardliners, who had become locked in a bitter internal struggle with moderates in the wake of Schafik Handal's resounding defeat at the polls in March 2004 presidential elections. End note.) In June (see ref. B), moderate Legislative Assembly Deputies Ileana Rogel and Jorge Escobar, accompanied by moderate former TSE Magistrate Julio Hernandez, Santa Ana Mayor Orlando Mena, and others, marched to FMLN headquarters to tender their resignations from the party. Resignations before and since have left the FMLN with only 24 of the 31 deputies with which it began the current Legislative Assembly--no longer even sufficient to block legislation requiring a two-thirds supermajority of 56 votes (such as those regarding assumption of foreign debt, or confirmation of officials such as the Attorney General).

[1](#)3. (C) On June 15, the FMLN dissidents who had resigned took initial steps in the lengthy process of registering a new party, the Revolutionary Democratic Front (FDR), submitting its constitution, bylaws, and official logo to the TSE. The group's National Coordinator Julio Hernandez outlined that the choice of name, once used by the FMLN's political wing during the 1980-1992 conflict, was an effort to deflect disparaging characterizations of FMLN moderates as "Leftist Lite" (see ref. C). The FDR then began collecting signatures in support of its being granted official status; under Article 159 of the Electoral Code, valid signatures must total at least three percent of voter turnout in the most recent (2003) municipal and Legislative Assembly elections, or approximately 42,000 signatures.

[1](#)4. (C) On October 27, the TSE announced that it had found nearly 12,000 of the 49,000 signatures submitted invalid, leaving the FDR almost 5,000 signatures short of the required 42,000. Some 1,752 names submitted featured nonexistent national identity document (DUI) numbers; 1,274 names and DUI numbers were duplicates; 316 had missing DUI numbers, and 239 names submitted differed from those on voter registration lists. An additional 6,387 signatures did not match those on registration lists, while in 1,775 cases, either a signature was missing from the FDR document, or a signature submitted by the FDR corresponded to a voter (unable to read and write) who had used a thumbprint on his/her voter registration, or vice versa. The FDR was given until November 11 to collect sufficient signatures to offset these shortfalls.

[1](#)4. (C) In an October 25 meeting with polooff, Hernandez and Rogel outlined what they characterized as an attempt at political "blackmail" on the part of the ruling ARENA party, which they alleged offered to "fix" things with the TSE in exchange for the FDR's support in confirming incumbent Attorney General Belisario Artigas for a second term--which

requires a two-thirds (56-vote) supermajority of the Assembly's 84 seats. (Note: Having formed a loose center-left coalition with others on June 22, the FDR and its allies have pursued an independent course, allying themselves with ARENA and the PCN when it suited their purposes. The FDR's key role has been in votes requiring a two-thirds majority. See ref. D. End note.)

15. (C) FDR officers announced November 1 that they had already succeeded in gathering the required 5,000 signatures, but that they would seek to submit a total of 8,000 additional signatures before the November 11 deadline in order to make up for any invalidations during the rolls' certification by the TSE. (Note: In the end, the FDR had submitted a total of approximately 9,000 signatures by November 3. End note.) On November 8, ARENA TSE President Walter Araujo continued to speak of the "difficulty" of the FDR's qualifying in time for the deadline, and on November 9 the FDR announced that it would seek legal status as a party via a Legislative Assembly decree. November 10 marked the last day possible for new parties to be officially registered prior to the formal opening of four-month campaign season, and as the week drew to a close, it became clear that the FDR's legal registration stood little chance. ARENA, the FMLN, PCN, and PDC indicated that they would not support any move to grant legal status via Legislative Assembly decree, and although the TSE had enlisted additional workers and extended its hours of operation, it managed to certify only 3,200 of 9,088 signatures submitted prior to the deadline. The Christian Social Populist Party, (PPSC, a PDC splinter group), Salvadoran Workers Party (PTS), and Salvadoran Patriotic Brotherhood (FPS) likewise failed to obtain official status.

16. (C) COMMENT: To most political observers, it was clear that FDR certification would have benefited ARENA in the March 2006 national elections, by splitting a significant number of potential voters from FMLN mayoral and deputy candidates. In fact, many predicted the presence of a strong FDR candidate in San Salvador would have given the ARENA candidate an excellent chance to take the city back after it was held by the left for so many years. This view, however, was clearly not shared by Saca or his party's pundits, who apparently calculated that the FDR could actually peel center voters away from ARENA, and could pose a longer term threat to ARENA. It further appeared that Saca was frustrated by futile negotiations with the FDR deputies over the re-election of Artiga, and came to the conclusion that the FDR was an even more difficult negotiating block in the Assembly than the FMLN itself. For its part, the FDR trusted early on that it would be certified by the ARENA-controlled TSE by virtue of the FDR's support for Artiga, and, as such,

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did not go through the trouble of securing the full 42,000 legitimate signatures. As a matter of fact, one FDR strategist told Polcouns that they had basically copied information from civil registry lists unto voter registration forms because they felt, at that point, that the TSE would not bother to go through the certification process. Had the FDR done its work and gathered the signatures it needed, it would have been virtually impossible for the TSE to deny them their certification. Now the FDR will have to try to survive through coalition building.
Barclay